

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND RESOURCES



*OPENING STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN DARRELL ISSA*

Oversight Hearing:

*“Strengthening the Nation’s Water Infrastructure:
The Army Corps of Engineers’ Planning Priorities”*

March 15, 2006

The Army Corps of Engineers has a long and distinguished history of building and maintaining the critical water resources infrastructure of the United States. As we have witnessed with Hurricane Katrina, the Corps’ traditional missions of flood control and navigation are more important than ever. And, I would like to take a moment to personally thank the many Corps employees who have volunteered to work in the devastated areas of the Gulf following Katrina, as well as those who have volunteered to work on projects in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thank you for your service.

The nation’s existing water infrastructure is a result of the priority-setting, decisions, and projects constructed in the past. For decades to come, infrastructure priorities that we set today will impact commerce, electricity generation, wetlands—and most importantly—the safety of communities that depend on the Corps for flood protection. It is imperative that we have the tools and information to make the right choices.

But the Corps faces a number of significant challenges in carrying out its mission. Funding for the Corps inevitably involves tradeoffs between congressionally authorized projects. And, unfortunately, crucial maintenance on existing infrastructure is sometimes deferred because of other competing priorities.

Next, financial management is another area of concern. It has become common practice in the Corps to shift funds to meet the needs of the moment, which suggests that priority-setting within the Corps is lacking.

Third, shortcomings in cost/benefit analyses done by the Corps have been well-documented by GAO, the National Academies of Science, and the Army Inspector-General. To its credit, the Corps has moved aggressively to address these flaws and improve its planning processes. The Corps has also taken steps to be more collaborative and reorganize so that “stove-piping” no longer exists.

In conclusion, I must note that we are not here to revisit the Water Resources Development Act, which passed the House by more than 390 votes.

The Subcommittee is meeting here today to examine the steps taken by the Corps to improve its operations. We must ensure that the nation’s critical infrastructure needs are fulfilled. Because the level of Corps’ funding is a persistent issue, it is all the more important that Corps’ operations are efficient and result in the most benefit for every dollar spent.

I look forward to hearing from our esteemed witnesses. Today we have:

- Mr. Douglas Lamont, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Project Planning;
- Ms. Anu Mittal, Director, Natural Resources and Environment team of the Government Accountability Office;
- Mr. Steve Ellis, Vice President of Taxpayers for Common Sense; and
- Ms. Elizabeth Birnbaum, Vice President and General Counsel, American Rivers.